



# To Hel & Back

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and



40 countries, 30,000 miles, 2 continents, 1 trip!

**AS OUR PARTY** of three arrived in Cape Town, we first deposited ourselves into the care of Rob, Sian and Shannon Stampe, receiving a thoroughly warm welcome.

Our next job was to start getting the car ready to take us home up the West coast, which we expect to be far rougher than East coast roads. Being slightly over budget we decided to try and approach a couple of local companies for help with parts.

The local Land Rover specialists, Roverland, got right behind the trip. Roverland owner Martin and his daughter Carol gave us a lot of time and advice and, with all the relevant parts in stock, we grabbed an armful of gaskets, seals, nuts and bolts.

Having learnt our lessons from working on the car in the street at home, we looked for a workshop. Rob (aka Mr Fix-it) got on the case and soon secured us space.

*The Defender – 15,782 miles from home – dips it's wheels in both the Atlantic and Indian oceans simultaneously.*

In head honcho Andy Haigh-Smith's workshop we were blessed with all the kit we could possibly need, as Andy's barn is often used to service the Reactvid rally cars. Incidentally, Andy's son Ashley is the youngest ever South African rally champion and is winning races left right and centre. He's a lovely lad and clearly one to keep an eye on in the future.

#### a major hurdle

We completed all the routine menial tasks of tightening, oiling and greasing before moving on to assess the big issues. When we discussed the 'worst case scenarios' together several months ago in the UK, we both joked that blowing the engine apart on our Defender would take top trumps.

At the time, we were smiling. Such a major mechanical malfunction could not possibly befall such a pair of diligent overlanders. Certainly not.

As with all aspects of our trip preparation, when we assessed the problem in the UK, we sought advice from local notaries as to the health of the 300Tdi. The common theme enthused by most was, 'well, it's a bit worn, but that is normal on an engine this old, and these motors go on for ever. You'll probably be fine', which matched our own estimation.

Several months later, as we stared at our open rocker cover, watching the 'puff-puff' of smoke, with thoughts as black as the oil it was displacing, we realised the situation had worsened.

Whether it was due to the extra load on the engine, the off-road terrain, six months of long motorway miles, the increased heat or the additional weight incurred by Carl's high heel collection, the engine has now worn its way through a set of piston rings. Arguably of greater worry to all, Carl has worn his way

# ENTERING HEL

With their goal of Die Hel within touching distance, disaster strikes as the 300Tdi dies, leaving Tom and Carl with some big decisions

Words and Photos by: Carl James and Tom Picton





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through a set of heels.

Aside from the other checks, our most visceral indicator that things had taken a turn for the worst came from the rather splendid redecorating job the sprayed oil from the turbo was making of the engine bay and bonnet underside.

Andy suggested we contact his friend, a Landy and Jag mechanic of great local repute. Trevor arrived and joined us in staring at the ominous columns of white smoke emanating from the open oil cap. Trevor stroked his beard and mused: "Well, if it was my car and I was driving up the West coast, I'd do the rings".

We took a deep breath, nodded to each other and reached for the torque wrench. As the cylinder head bolts were loosened, a sense of anticipation and excitement replaced our earlier trepidation. We were about to strip our first engine.

## damage limitation

Carrying this work out in Africa had never been part of the plan, but we were exhilarated (or running on shock) nonetheless.

With the cylinder head and sump off we removed the pistons one by one, marking everything and working as methodically as we could, Trevor proving to be an excellent and patient teacher. The first of a quartet of problems revealed itself as we examined the head gasket. A wafer thin strip clung onto existence in line with number three piston. Our attention alerted, we inspected piston three, finding it grooved and scored. The third cylinder was, naturally, equally scored. The pistons were examined and it became clear that the ring seats were severely worn.

## This page:

*The boys take the 110 along the scenic Garden Route from Cape Town, on the final leg to Die Hel.*

## Right:

*Half way there! Carl and Tom have a significant couple of days in places that, for the past year, have been but a dream. Trip to the mountains was with the Eden Land Rover Club.*

Finally, we cast our wide-eyed gaze over the underside of the cylinder head. One, two, three, four, five and, ah there it is, six deep cracks.

This wasn't going to be a simple 'replace piston rings' job, was it? No, this was a 'total bloody rebuild' job. In the subdued silence, we tried to remain lively and not stare inactively at the engine, lying in a dozen futilely well-labelled piles around the room. Numbers filled our brain, and we knew they weren't small.

In short, we would need a new cylinder head, new pistons, new bearings, new gaskets, new head bolts and new seals. As well as sourcing new parts we needed to have the block re-bored and honed, in order to smooth out the scoring inside the cylinder, on top of finding an engineering firm to similarly re-cut the worn crank shaft.

After searching the internet and speaking to suppliers we realised we were faced with a bill of £5,000 to have the work done. Of course it is possible to rebuild an engine without a garage doing the work, but parts alone would come to over £1,000 and on top of that we would need a good workshop and expert help to properly strip the engine and reassemble it, otherwise we were wasting our time.

The reality was simple: we didn't have this to spend and still have enough money to return home.

Shaking ourselves from this stupor, we got back to our host's house and

did what we could. E-mails were sent, phone calls made, answers sought, pleas issued, prayers made. Quite frankly, we needed all the help we could get. Andy immediately offered us the continued use of his workshop and Trevor offered his time, all gratis. This was a huge relief and a great starting point in this immense challenge facing us.

First off, we contacted the big boys back in Blighty, Britpart and Bearmach, who both promised us all the support they could. The knowledge that people are going to go out of their way to help you when you are round the other side of the world with a broken car is wonderful and lifted our spirits significantly.

Aware of potential logistical issues with having items sent from the UK we also got in touch with the locally based GAP Agencies, the dealer for Land Rover original pistons, Germany's Kolbens Schmidt Pistons. Very promptly we had a reply from Deutschland and the guys agreed to supply a set of pistons, complete with rings.

## powerful friends

Meanwhile Richard Pigg from Britpart got back in touch with us to see how we were progressing and wanting to know exactly what parts we needed, insisting we send him the complete list. Those who are familiar with our previous articles will be well aware that we have a great relationship with Britpart, representing as they do one

of our largest (and certainly most understanding) sponsors.

Britpart have previously helped us out with a new flywheel, a new rear crossmember, a new set of headlights, new indicator stalks and switches to name but a few of the majestic myriad of parts we fitted.

So, to ask Britpart for help with a new cylinder head was pushing matters somewhat. However, with the trip in the balance and the car unable to move, we felt we had to ask the question. As long as you avoid offending people when you ask for help, the worst that can happen is people say 'no'.

After checking availability in Cape Town, Richard got back to us explaining that all of the parts we needed to finish rebuilding the engine would be available for collection in two hours. We were speechless and sat down to take in the news. After repeated sleepless nights from stress and being faced with the reality of ending this challenge which had taken a year and a half of planning, just halfway, here we were presented with the opportunity to keep on track.

We still had a heck of a lot of

work to do, but if everything came together it would have been hugely thanks to Britpart. 'We best get you home' Richard told us, which fits with everything that we've experienced from this family based company. What a lovely bunch of guys.

## back to the block

Back at home, always trying to be as much help as they could, Rob and Sian insisted we use one of their cars, so we set off to search for the best engineering company in CT, as all the new parts would be a waste of time if the block wasn't machined accurately. A few phone calls later and we were in the car with the 300Tdi block weighing down the rear springs, new pistons in hand, racing over to Strand Precision Engineering. That same day, all the cutting and re-boring was finished.

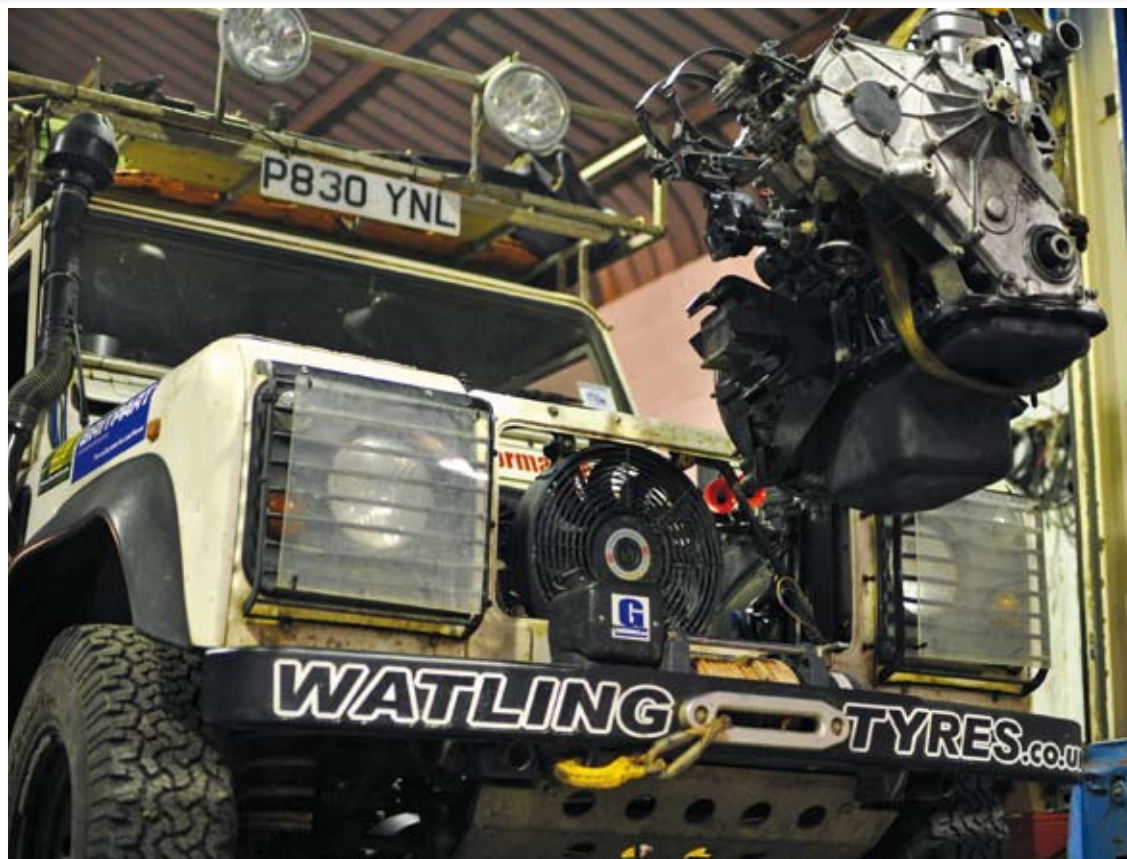
That night, we sat back and enjoyed our host's company and sublime cooking ability. As we chatted about the visceral differences between other African countries and RSA, we again discussed how positive change might occur in the poorer parts of Africa.



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## SPECIAL THANKS

### THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS

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We discussed our time in Ethiopia and it helped further put into perspective the benefit of the work of Link Ethiopia, never throwing money at a problem but simply supporting education so that people can help themselves.

After a night off, we headed over to Montague Gardens to meet Mike from LR Services who facilitated the collection of our Britpart sponsored parts. Amazingly, Mike even offered to become a sponsor and kindly supplied us with all the filters we would need to get us home, as well as a replacement fuel lift pump as ours had started to leak.

With boxes of shiny bits we headed back to Andy's workshop and met clever Trevor who supervised and educated us in the art of engine rebuilding. His attention to detail was phenomenal; every torque setting was triple checked, endfloat examined and engine spun by hand with clearances double checked left, right and centre. "I want those con-rods spotless," Trevor was heard to demand as we readied the parts for reassembly.

Over the course of the next couple of days the motor began to take shape, Trevor coming down in the evenings to help us through the complex aspects. Taller and wider

with every component bolted back on, before we knew it the sealant had set and it was time to put the engine back in. After a good old wiggle to realign the engine and gearbox we said goodnight to our mentors Trevor and Randal and worked away into the night re-attaching pipes, hoses and other bits. We headed home at 3am and by 4pm the next day were in a position to fire the engine.

Having corrected a mix up with wires to the fuel pump and oil sensor, we turned the key. Instantly, the engine fired, just as Trevor had said it would. "Of course it will fire, when every clearance and measurement is perfect," he explained.

#### crossing into Hel

On Sunday morning we left Cape Town and headed East to take in Cape Agulhas, the southern most point in Africa. At Agulhas, we reversed the Landy down onto the beach and simultaneously dipped its wheels in both the Indian and Atlantic oceans. From here we rolled into Franverleigh lodge late that night, ready for the half-way mark the following day,

At 7am we were off, surrounded by other Landys from the Eden LR club, heading into the wilderness of the Small Karoo, where Die Hel is

situated. After a four hour drive on dirt roads, crossing umpteen rivers with water over the bonnet, we found ourselves on a cliff-top, looking down into The Hel itself.

Surrounded by hills on all sides, this tiny place earned its name simply due to the difficulty getting in and getting out. With the 110 parked overlooking The Hel, we thought what better time to stop, pop the champagne and take some photos.

We rolled down the hill, being careful to get the right line in each hairpin to ensure we got round in one. At the campsite at the bottom we were given another bottle of champagne by the guys from the Land Rover club, drinking and eating off the fire.

We are so grateful for all the people who came along to really make this halfway marker quite an event, many of whom had taken time off work to be there. Thanks go to Steve and Sue from Franverleigh for all of the organising and help throughout our time here. An incredibly eventful one and a half months in SA has now come to an end, as we are here in Windhoek on time for Carl's brother Christian. Thanks to others generosity, we are still moving and heading home. Thanks all.

LRM